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ABSTRACT

The aim of this monograph is to place reading in an ecological connection (i.e., systems reaching far beyond mere classroom reading) and to illustrate the relations between some of the many factors influencing today's reading material, reading education, and reading research. Reading is examined in connection with different societies, in an attempt to describe reading as the dynamic factor, indeed the most important factor, within the social development that reading, itself, also constitutes. Sections of the monograph discuss how school is changing because society is changing, and how reading materials and reading habits in the Nordic countries have changed over the last 1,000 years. Sections further discuss the dramatic changes in reading in the 20th century (noting how reading has penetrated every function and every corner of society) and the differences in children's texts from the 1920s to today, comparing their contents, concepts, language, and visual appearance, and noting that a wide range of new processes and functions are now termed "reading." The monograph's final sections demonstrate that: reading instruction has to be adapated to the conditions of the time; maintain that reading as it is now taught reflects society as it was, rather than as it is now, an information-based society; and discuss reading in the future. It is concluded that there exists not only a question of new reading possibilities arising in the society--but also of how the new reading will influence the society in which it arises and develops. Forty-seven references are listed. (RS)

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# Society is not what it used to be, -neither is reading

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Mogens Jansen

# Society is Not What It Used to Be – Neither is Reading

The Danish National Institute for
Educational Research, Denmark

Society Is not What It Used to Be,
- Neither is Reading
DPI No. 1991.72

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# About Reading in an Ecological Perspective

**School is changing, because society is changing**

It is a general experience that the older generation is worried about the new generation, a.o. because standards are changed, and because the old will always be of the opinion that the standards are changed for the worse. The young will be of the opinion that they are changed for the better because the young are the ones to make the changes.

Within school and education there has even been talk of *a collapse* of standards and of decline - not only the decline of morals, but also the decline of wisdom. There has, in point of fact, been this talk to a larger or smaller degree as long as formalized education has existed. However, in the course of a few decades distinct changes have taken place also in norms and attitudes; perhaps today particularly a zigzag between different standards, attitudes, etc. is obvious in a retrospect of these decades?

These changes are often referred to in terms of reduction and characterized as follows: „We now see a lowered standard of knowledge in the pupils at the upper levels".

But *is* the level actually declining, as maintained?

Many people have been of the opinion that when the educational possibilities for the many are expanded, the 'standard' is (almost automatically) lowered at the same time. Often this expression is even used, as if everyone agreed what it covers.

## The Educational Quadrangle – with a 40 year interval

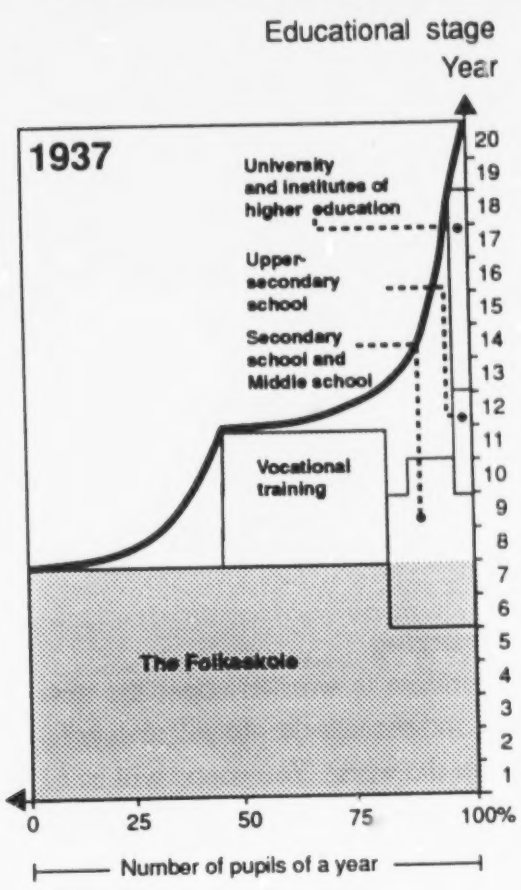



*Figure 1A*

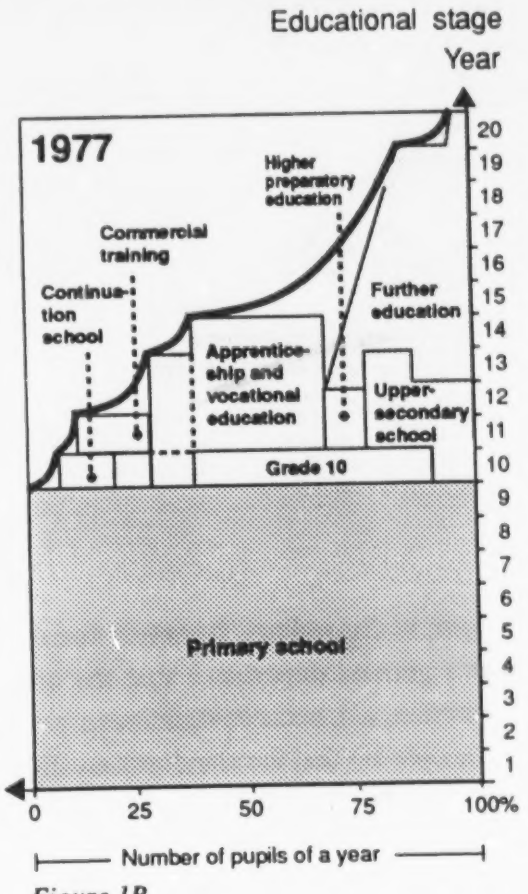



*Figure 1B*

However, it may mean two things:

Firstly, the concept may refer to the objectives of teaching laid down by the educational system within a certain grade or a certain type of school; in this case a lowered standard means that the objectives set are no longer as high as before.

Secondly, the demands made by a specific school department on the pupils to live up to the expectations of the school may be expressed by means of 'standards' which may e.g. be described by marks.

The difficulty in comparing standards, school departments, the same examination prior to and after an Education Act, etc. is described as follows by Torsten Husén (1969): „When comparing the standard of knowledge in e.g. arithmetic between 18-year-old pupils in the upper grades in the U.S. High School and in Europe ... the average in the U.S. is found to be very much lower than in Europe. The absurdity in this is evident, at least when it is established that what is compared

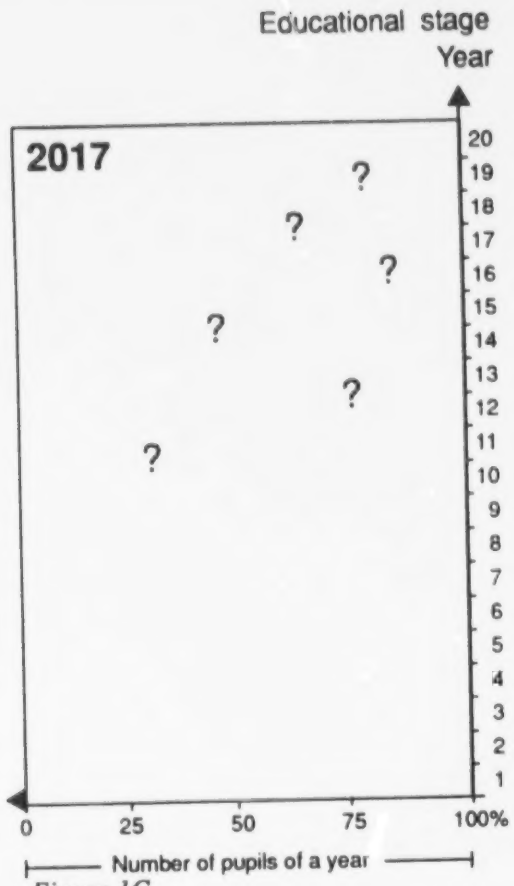



*Figure 1C*

The three educational quadrangles describe the education as follows:

Figure 1A: As per the 1937 Act.
Figure 1B: In 1977.
Figure 1C invites the reader's imagination regarding 2017.
Figures 1A and 1B reflect an agricultural/industrial society and a service/automation society, respectively. In both cases, the society can easily be made out behind the quadrangle.
„The grey clouds" indicate the in-service and further education.

is 70% of the year in the U.S. with 10% in Germany or England." - In other words, what characterizes the large majority on one hand was compared with what characterizes a small selected group on the other hand.

If a specific limited group of pupils is to form part of a comparison, the comparison must be made between similar parts of the year in question. It is not enough to ask how far the best have come; it is necessary to ask also how many out of the individual years have come how far.

Also the Northern countries know this discussion which can be illustrated by Figure 1, showing the transition from a 'triangular' towards a 'quadrangular' educational system, here reproduced partly from Dalby et al., 1983; Jansen & Kreiner, 1985. The growth of the education in Denmark can be described by comparing Figure 1A (from 1937) with Figure 1B (from 1977): The more of the 'educational quadrangle' is filled out, the more difficult it must be to keep the

school departments and educational departments unchanged by the change in the pupil intake. And now the exciting thing is to see what will characterize the figure at 1C. So far 'the grey clouds' (= the further education and in-service education) seem to become typical in the years to come. They have been on their way for many years. To a certain extent, their growth seems to replace the more traditional wishes of 'filling up' the educational quadrangle from below.

Over a number of years changes will be seen in the recruiting for all educations above the basic level. However, also the contents of the educations are changed - fortunately, because the society is changing. The contents are not only updated; in many ways the basic attitudes in the educational system are changed during only a few years:

During the so-called 'prospering sixties', also we here in Scandinavia concentrated rather a lot on „the creative side" (which was *also* needed). Looking in the rear-view mirror today, it may seem that too little emphasis was put on „the basic skills".

Today we might see opposite tendencies?

It seems that in its eternal shuttle service from ditch to ditch pedagogy every time runs over attitudes and persons trying to hold on to a creative attitude, while at *the same time* the basic skills are emphasized. - However, to a high degreee, the two sides are both sides to the same question. By way of example, working with fiction includes creative work, while at the same time it calls for basic competence in the subject.

Mathematicians and musicians, reading teachers and writers - everyone will argue in favour of basic skills as well as creativeness. However, at different times different things are rated higher - because society is changing. And because the school is dependent on the changes in society, the school must change.

The school does not necessarily become *poorer* because of the changes. It does not necessarily become *better* either. It becomes *different*.

## Also reading materials and reading change

The fascinating - and of course creatively imaginative - description, based on research, by Alexander Marschack of the nomadic hunters' *need* for a system enabling them to write, is well worth considering (Marschack, 1972). Denise Schmandt- Besserat's creative interpretations of 'the meaning' of countless small clay figures (= what their use might have been) led to descriptions of a stage in the

development of writing, changing from three-dimensional into two-dimensional (Schmandt-Besserat, 1981a; 1981b; 1982a; 1982b; Kulpa, 1990).

Also 'signs' from the formation of the alphabet (something that has taken place several places in the world, not simultaneously, but independently) provide possibilities of interpreting materials the first stages of which we know very little about. For obvious reasons the period prior to writing is - undescribed!

But ever since writing and reading came into the picture reading has - at least here in the North - been subject to change, both when it comes to contents and to visual appearance.

The Faroese series of stamps shown in Figures 2-6 tells others than philatelists how in a Northern society the possibilities of *reading* have changed, just within historical times.

Between the year 800 and the year 1000 the history of the written word begins in the Faroe Islands; this is told by the text of the two runic stones in Figure 2.

The stamp in Figure 3 shows a few lines of the „Sheep Letter", a parchment script from 1298 about the early Faroese legislation on sheep-breeding.

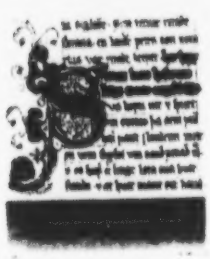
With the '6-kroner' stamp in Figure 4 we reach „Tórshavn 1522". It is a reproduction of a seal showing the heraldic symbol of the Faroes, the ram. The writing on the stamp is from a document dated 1533.

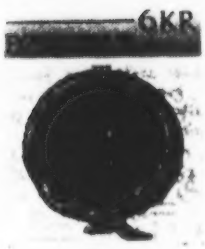
The '1-krone' stamp, Figure 5, shows Faroese folk songs. About this stamp (Postverk Foeroya, 1981) it says: „Even if the well-known sound of folk songs has been heard in the Faroes way back in time, the folk music could not be given full status as historical literature until the 19th century when this music was first written down in notes." This is an underlining of the tradition - the verbal reproduction from generation to generation, and at the same time it is an acceptance that not until a writing down takes place is something handed down which the next generation can be sure to hand down largely unchanged.

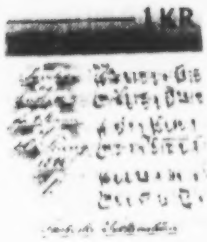
The reproduction of the notes which form part of the written history of the country is from 1846.

These stamps are an attempt to create a series „which should, to a high degree, represent the country, her people, and her culture" - from reading of runes via reading of law text via reading as part of the „power" to reading as written folk songs.

In this line the reading of holy scripts is missing - to complete the reading which






*Figures 2-6*
These Faroese stamps show also to other people than the philatelists of today how reading has changed in a Northern country over the last thousand years.

was, for several centuries after the runes, the very contents of the written text.

The last stamp, Figure 6, shows the national library in Tórshavn where some of the most valuable book treasures from the Faroes can be seen.

## Exactly in this century reading has changed dramatically

In many ways the reading material has changed during this century, not least when it comes to visual appearance. By way of example, this will appear from Figure 7, showing page 3 of Sydsvenska Dagbladet (from Malmoe, Sweden) of November 15th, 1915.

The newspaper tells about World War I in *words* - not in pictures! There are no quick-written texts in the paper. The war news of both parties is reported, and the rather long, connected texts are characteristic features. At that time the newspaper was the source of knowledge of the time, and for better or worse it invited another reading than is the case today. Today reading is far from being the only or the most essential source of experience and knowledge for everyone; and the reading of

# Världskriget.

## Det första krigsåret.

En återblick dag från dag.

## Från västra krigsskådeplatsen

Tyska stora högkvarterets rapport.

## Franska kommuniké.

## Från östra krigsskådeplatsen

Tyska stora högkvarterets rapport.

## Officiellt från Wien.

## Från Balkankrigsskådeplatsen.

Tyska stora högkvarterets rapport.

## Officiellt från Wien.

## Franskt kommuniké.

## Ryskt kommuniké.

## Från de turkiska krigsskådeplatserna.

Rapport från konstantinopels generalstaben.

## Sjökriget.

Anconaaffären.

## Diverse krigsrubriker.

## Från krigsmuseum i Berlin.

*Figure 7*

A typical newspaper page from 1915

- with accounts from World War I.



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today has become more than reading of largely connected text.

*But reading is still taking place.*

And without reading there would be no society like the one we have today - because while reading here in the North became something far less exclusive than before, reading penetrated every function and every corner of society - to an extent that is hardly realized in the everyday life.

Just try for only one day to notice how handicapped one would be in a Northern society without being able to read. Formulate this task one evening: „Tomorrow I will read nothing at all: No morning paper, no notes on the kitchen table, no bus timetable, no signs, not one single text at work, no printed matter, no TV subtitles, etc. No reading whatsoever!" It would indeed be a very peculiar day (Jansen, 1979).

Reading has become something very broad, very different, very varied - something forming part of almost every subject in school, of largely all educations, of the everyday work, often of the family life and the association life - and always of the social life.

**What was read in 1920**

No doubt, the 5-6 year old in 1920 has had „Tant Grön, tant Brun och tant Gredelin" read to him or has read the book himself. It was published in 1918 and became tremendously popular like most of Elsa Beskow's picture books. At that time „Barnbiblioteket Saga" published many cheap and popular children's books, and the Christmas magazine „Jultomten" was published in so many copies that it outnumbered all other picture books. *Book* reading had become general long ago.

Comparing the children's texts from that time with those of today, changes are apparent both when it comes to the contents, concepts, language, and visual appearance of the texts.

Figures 8 and 9 show a page from a *Norwegian* beginning reader and a page from *the Swedish* primer about Sörgården, a little farm in the depths of the country (reproduced here in black/white). It is obvious from both texts and pictures that they are built on the children's precomprehension; and at the same time these pictures and texts have given them more knowledge about the world they saw around them.

Greenland is described in Figures 10 and 11 (extracts from two Norwegian geography textbooks) and the U.S. is described in Figures 12 and 13 (extracts from

two Swedish geography textbooks). Such extracts show what kind of information the *reading* child received.

Naturally, the information given to the child by these texts was marked by the first decades of the 20th century.

The desire to go on reading, to read more things and other things, was built upon material like this - and the comprehension of the texts became the natural starting point of the knowledge about the world to which reading was the access. These texts contributed towards forming the picture of the world on which the adult built spontaneously during the interwar period.

**And reading today?**

Perhaps today the 13 year-old Danish boy in a surburban district reads in a magazine of comic strips (= looks at the pictures and reads a bit). His big sister scans a telephone directory; in a few years she will find the number on a screen. The boy's mother skims a catalogue from a department store, while the father 'leafs through/reads' a publication about tennis; he probably only looks at the pictures and reads the captions.

This family read. But *what* books do they read? *What* do they read? *How* do they read? The four of them read the paper every day, and every week they read the weeklies. But *what* do they read in the paper? *What* weeklies do they read? And *what* do they read in those weeklies? - In the paper they may read concentrated telegrams, longer articles, etc. They probably also read comic strips as well as sports news, recipes, and TV programs - alternating with local or international notes and articles.

Occasionally they all read an electric newspaper, a speedometer and an oil pressure gauge, short stories, advertisements, etc. - and computer transcripts. The adults are getting used to the strange letters and numbers written on incomprehensible bills of different colours and of a great financial consequence. In school the two young people in the family read maps, diagrams, equations, novels, poetry and books of non-fiction. All four also read texts in languages other than Danish, perhaps one of these languages is not even written in the same alphabet as the Danish?

And this surburban family is hardly an atypical Northern family of today.

In short, '*reading*' has now become an everyday word covering many extremely different things.

*Figure 8*

Idag høier vi.
Paa toppen av lasset
sitter Ole og Marit.
Einar gaar ved siden. Han maa passe
nøie paa; ellers kan det høie lasset velte.
Borken kan veien til laaven.
Den har gaat den ofte nok.

Oppe i heien rauter
Dagros og Rosa.
Kalven er med.
Ole og Marit har salt til Dagros
og Rosa og kalven. Borte i haugen gaar
Audun med sau e ne. De faar ogsaa salt.

*Figure 9*

*p p P P* p p P P

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| rep | mast | so-pa | på-se | lapp |
| våp | mask | li-pa | pö-sa | kap-pa |

Nyss kom en kat-ta,
klev på min mat-ta.
"Mi-au, mi-au", sa kat-tan,
"man vi-lar väl på mat-tan."

»Mor», sa Karin, »katten rev en rispa på min kappa.» »Vi får väl sätta en lapp över», sa mor. »I låren finnas

*Figure 8*
In translation, the Norwegian text says:

Today is harvest day.
Ole and Marit
are on top of the load.
Einar walks beside them.
He must take care, or else
the high load may tip over.
The horse knows the way to the barn.
It has walked that way many a time.

Dagros and Rosa are lowing
up in the fell-field.
Also the calf is there.
Ole and Marit give salt to
Dagros and Rosa and the calf.
On the nearest hilltop
Audun watches the sheep.
They are also given salt.

*Figure 9*
In translation, the Swedish text says:

rope mast sweep bag patch
goose worm cry mug coat

A cat came in
and scratched my rug.
„Miaow, miaow!" said the cat.
„How nice it is
to rest on the rug."

„Mother," said Karin.
„The cat tore my coat."
„Well, we shall have to put on a patch."

*Figure 10*

## Grønland.

hører til Danmark. Det er jordens største ø, omtrent 3 ganger saa stor som Norge og Sverige tilsammen, med vel 10 000 mennesker. Landet ligger dækket av sne og is. Paa kysten bor *eskimoerne* jordens nordligste folk. De er smaa av vekst, ernærer sig av jagt og fiskeri; de lever i telt eller lave jordhytter og er svært skiddenfærdige av sig.

*Figure 11*

**Grønland** er jordens største ø, saa stor som fjerdeparten av Europa. Indlandet er dækket av en vældig bræ, *indlandsisen*; den første som vandret over denne, var *Nansen*. Ned gjennem dalene glider store isbræer; ofte naar de like ned til sjøen, og her løsner der sig store stykker, som flyter ut av fjorden som *isfjeld* (bræen «kalver»). Klimaet er meget koldere end i Norge paa samme bredde, men paa det isfri land er der allikevel en noksaa rik vekst av græs, blomster og busker. Her lever ogsaa renen.

Folket, *eskimoene*, lever av renjagt og sælfangst. De er flinke sjøfolk, og i sine lette skindbaater, *kajakker*, følger de ofte sælen langt ut paa havet; alt i alt er der 11 000 av dem.

Eskimoer fra Grønland.

Landet tilhører danskerne. Av den gamle norske bebyggelse findes der næsten ikke spor igjen.



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*Figure 10*
In translation, the Norwegian text says:

**Greenland**
belongs to Denmark. It is the biggest island in the world, almost three times as big as Norway and Sweden put together, with a population of about 10,000. The country is covered with snow and ice. The Eskimos, the northernmost people of the Earth, live along the coast. They are short of stature, and support themselves by hunting and fishing; they live in tents or low mud huts and they are terribly dirty.

*Figure 11*
**Greenland** is the biggest island in the world, as big as one fourth of Europe. The inland is covered with an enormous glacier, the ice cap; the first man to walk across the ice cap was Nansen. Big glaciers slide through the valleys; often they even reach the sea and here big parts break loose and float away out of the fiord as icebergs (the glacier „calves"). The climate is much colder than in Norway at the same latitude, but still, in the ice-free land there is a very rich growth of grass, flowers, and bushes. Also the reindeer live here.

The people, the Eskimos, live by reindeer hunting and sealing. They are very good sailors, and in their light skin boats, the kayaks, they often pursue the seal far out into the open sea; in all there are 11,000 of them.

*Ill.* *
Eskimos from Greenland.

The country belongs to Denmark. There is hardly a trace left of the ancient Norwegian building.

*Figure 12*

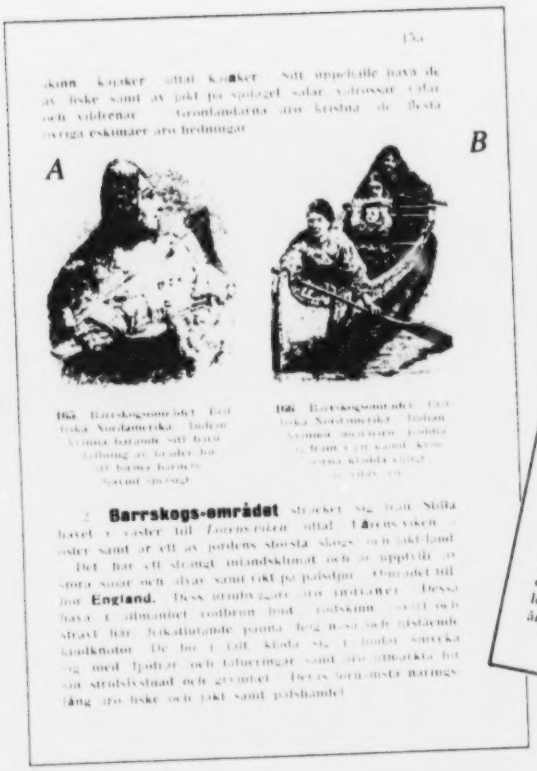

*Figure 13*

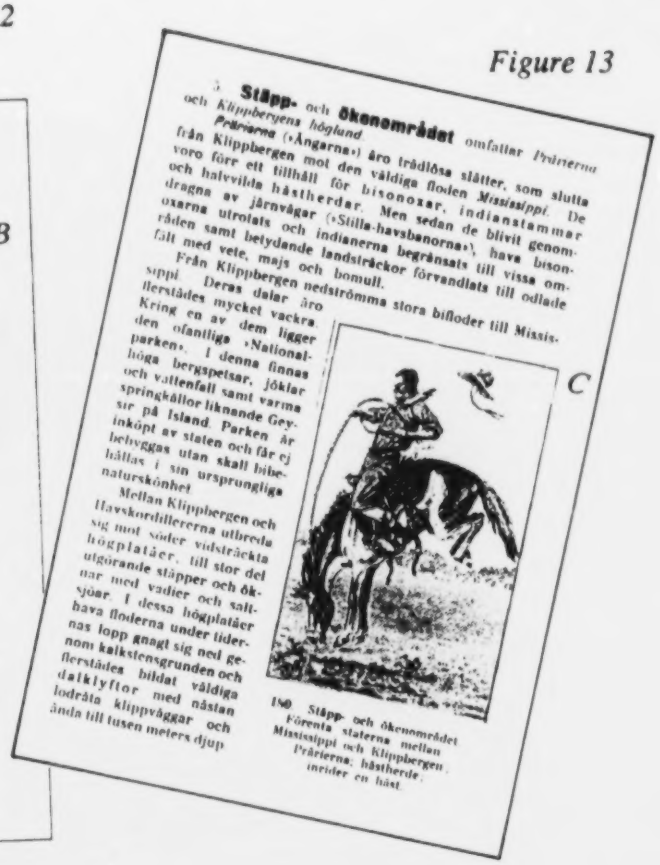

*Figure 12*

In translation, the Swedish text says:

skin - kayaks. They live by fishing,
and hunting for seal, walrus, whale,
reindeer, and sea birds. The Greenlanders
are Christian; most of the other Eskimos
are heathen.

*Ill. A*

British North America.
Squaw with her child
who is in a mould of boards
to give the child's head a pointed shape.

*Ill. B*

British North America.
Squaws with children,
paddling a canoe; dressed
according to the custom
of the whites.

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The area of coniferous forest stretching from the Pacific Ocean in the West to the St. Lawrence Bay in the East belongs to the largest wood and hunting lands in the world.

The climate is severely continental and the area is full of great lakes and rivers and is rich in fur-bearing animals. The area belongs to England. The original inhabitants are Red Indians. In general, they have reddish-brown skin („Redskins"), black and rough hair, receding forehead, high nose, and prominent cheekbones. They live in tents, dress in hides, adorn themselves with feathers and tattooings, and are known to be cruel and eager to fight. They live mainly by fishing, hunting, and fur trade.

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*Figure 13*

The area of steppes and deserts includes the prairies and the highland of the Rocky Mountains.

The prairies are plains with no trees, stretching from the Rocky Mountains to the huge river, the Mississippi. They used to be a resort for buffaloes, Indian tribes, and herds of half-wild horses. However, after the plains were penetrated by the railroads, the buffaloes have been exterminated, the Indians have been confined to certain areas, and vast stretches of land have been changed into cultivated fields of wheat, corn, and cotton.

From the Rocky Mountains big tributaries descend to the Mississippi. In many cases, their valleys are very beautiful. One of them is surrounded by „The National Park" with high mountain peaks and waterfalls as well as hot springs like Geysir in Iceland. The park is Government property and must be kept in its original natural beauty.

Between the Rocky Mountains and the Cordilleras, high tableland stretches to the South in the shape of plains and deserts with wadi and salt lakes. In this tableland the rivers have - in the course of time - dug into the limestone ground and formed enormous ravines, up to 1,000 metres deep and with almost vertical rock walls.

*Ill. C*

Steppe and desert area.

The United States between the Rocky Mountains and Mississippi; prairies; herds of horses; breaking in a horse.

As one word it is not very suitable to describe processes, functions, etc. which are of interest to the many people teaching reading and which might, to the same extent, be of interest to the many more who are going to be taught reading during the coming decades.

The latter will probably need another kind of reading than the one they master today and another kind of reading than the one taught to their parents.

**Reading is - something dynamic**

During the last couple of generations it has been emphasized that reading is not learned once and for all.

Since 1950 (Jansen, 1959; 1968; Ministry of Education, 1960) the reading instruction here in Scandinavia has become 'a subject' which does not only concern the pupils during their first few years in school or which the somewhat or much older disabled readers are taught:

Neither is it a skill in which the individual reaches an upper limit at a given time - according to the results of reading practice courses in advanced reading for young and adults (Jacobsen et al., 1972; Jansen et al., 1978; Jansen, 1987).

For further elucidation reference is made to reading practice courses which have quite a different objective and in which pupils in the special education are engaged (Strunge, 1977a; 1977b; Lau et al., 1981; Gamby et al., 1987) - just to mention results from the Northern countries where research results are scarce, but the systematic educational developmental work in school is general.

The very comprehensive work with reading practice courses in the class (Krogh & Munch, 1980; Mikkelsen & Moltke-Leth, 1985; Lau et al., 1989) is yet another example of a type of development work in reading where the width is enlarged and „reading" has become a more differentiated concept than it used to be.

Many things in society are changing, also the education in school and also, to a high degree, reading. The only certain thing seems to be that the requirements (also in reading) both grow and vary - not only in relation to the selected few, the highly competent, but to the whole width of the group of pupils.

And to *everyone* reading is the starting point of experience and knowledge - and is closely connected with learning and with the formation of concepts.

During the same decades the world has become smaller: Travelling is no longer only for well-to-do people, diplomats, etc. as before World War I.

And the problems of living in a small language area like the Danish and having to acquire, by reading, very specific or highly specialized skills pile up far beyond travelling!

It does not make sense discussing *whether* more than one foreign language should be learned at a pretty high level - and by everyone.

To almost everybody it is necessary to learn more than one language, and many need to learn more than two.

The question of *whether* foreign languages should be taught is beyond discussion. On the other hand, it is rightly discussed *what* languages 'should' be taught as well as methods *in* - and times *for* - the introduction of the foreign language teaching in school.

One consequence is that *reading* is no longer identical with reading in the mother tongue: In the world of today, he who reads only his mother tongue is not only linguistically handicapped, but also conceptually pinioned. This is also apparent during discussions in foreign languages with the original 'holders' of the language in question: In many cases, conversations in one language and one language only will be an advantage, but occasionally it also represents a conceptual limitation.

However, also in this connection it is obvious that *reading is something dynamic - something undergoing changes*.

We no longer 'reach' the 'object' of our reading instruction. A few generations ago we were able to state what we wanted with our reading education.

Now the world has changed, while we were on our way towards where we thought the object was.

However, the purpose of teaching reading can surely be maintained?

Perhaps, and only perhaps:

In the reading instruction today we can hardly attain more than keeping the *aim* of the daily teaching in view - and then - in our teaching - „lay down the rails immediately before (and while) the train moves." The educational development work, both the long-term systematic work and the spontaneously inspiring work - secures that the rails will actually be there and that they will be laid down where they answer the purpose.

And reading is still both experience and knowledge - in 1991 like in 1911:

At that time 'reading' was taught in grade 1. Some of the pupils were even able to read what was available in grade 1, already before entering the school. They knew the alphabet and were able to read the primer and perhaps also the reader used in that place. They were able to 'read', i.e. decode, what they were expected to decode.

Those who had to learn to read more and better taught themselves to read. *If* they learned it - the majority did not and did not have to. But those pupils who went on to the book- learning educations taught themselves to read in different ways and in very varied reading matter.

However, as the group of people having to read much more difficult texts than the primers and readers in school grew larger the current reading instruction was no longer sufficient. Too few people were able to teach themselves spontaneously to read what was now necessary in 'reading'.

Instruction was needed in somewhat advanced reading and in different reading techniques.

Reading was no longer something confined to grade 1 or grade 2. Now reading was taught even up to the age of 10-11 - and not only in edifying literature, not even only in fiction. With the still increasing width of the educations at the higher levels it was necessary for the elementary reading instruction to be continued and for an advanced reading instruction to be continued. The demands for mastering both reading techniques and reading strategies had grown. Education in faction (Jansen, 1987) and non-fiction (Dalby et al., 1989; Jansen & Lau, 1989) had become necessary.

Now the reading matter has become still more extensive and still more varied - partly also more demanding. Another thing is that there are now far more pupils and students (children, young, and adults) than before who all have to live up to higher requirements in reading - a.o. they now also have to master various reading strategies.

In brief: The reading instruction has to be adapted to the conditions of the time - which means: It must be changed.

**Reading reflects society - as it was**

In his farewell address in Boston in 1968, Arthur Gates, the farsighted reading researcher, said:

„I went to school in a three-storey building with six classes. It was in a small, isolated town in North-West California." (In this connection, please see Figure 12-13!). „There was no library in the school, and there were no books in the classroom. In the town itself there were no books, no library, no bookshops, no newsstand, no cinemas, no street signs - no letters anywhere. There was nothing for a child to read.

Teaching children was a very serious matter; the school did not possess such improper things as books of fairy-tales. I was in the middle of grade 2, when for the first time the teacher stopped the instruction to read a story to us. We were just as surprised as we were thrilled - we felt that it was an offence against the basic teaching principles of that time.

Even during the period from 1918-1930 when I was working actively as a reading researcher the majority of American schools and communities were like the one described above." (Gates, 1968).

Glimpses of everyday situations more than suggest that reading today is definitely more than reading of books and magazines.

The reading of the everyday contains still more situations which have nothing to do with the reading of books and magazines. In a small Northern language area, where foreign language films, videos, and TV transmissions are not provided with speech in the mother tongue, but only with subtitles, 'reading' is also used in connection with these otherwise mainly picture-based media. Reading becomes more and - more and - - - more - - -

This has to have educational consequences; and so it will, since school always changes according to society - even if sometimes the change takes time. Other and more demands on the reading skills in the society today mean that everyone is faced with new requirements - and that many are faced with considerably larger requirements than before (Jansen, 1990).

The phrase that „we also need somebody to dig up potatoes" has long ago become empty: Today also an industry like agriculture is largely based on reading skills: The number of employment in the Danish agriculture dropped from more than 300,000 in 1940 to 216,000 in 1948, and to 20,500 in 1990 - and the yield is now much larger. Naturally, these figures should be read with the understanding

that today many more people are employed in the further manufacture and other connected trades, e.g. as consultants in the agricultural processing industry, as workers in the export trade, etc. However, reorganizations such as those reflected in the above figures have only been practicable because the still fewer people employed in the trades concerned have acquired a still larger degree of knowledge which is a.o. *also* based on reading skills.

Another phrase to the effect that „in future children will only have to learn enough to be able to stand in an assembly line" is even more absurd, even if other things than future vocational qualifications are disregarded: The automatized service society also calls for reading skills in many people. Chaplin's „Modern Times" became passé long ago.

Now the society can better be characterized as an 'information-based society' (Servan-Schreiber, 1981).

In case the description 'service society' is preferred, this likewise builds on the reading competence of the individual.

**Reading in the future?**

If someone would like to predict how things will become - how the future will be - there is every reason not to do so! We often remember the future so badly (Jansen, 1990). However, we should not just „put up with the future"; it must be planned, and to a certain degree *it can* be planned (Kaufmann, 1974).

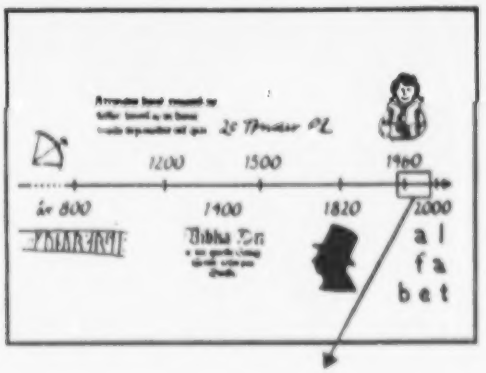
In this connection it should not be forgotten that the reading development in the different countries *has been* and still *is* so different that it does not make much sense trying to predict some *common* features - not even for comparable countries within the North Western culture group in Europe.

By looking at Figure 14 and seeing what has happened in Denmark within the field of reading since 1950 the reader may at least be able to sketch some considerations for himself.

In Denmark around 1950 the general aim of the instruction was to teach the children and the young to read relatively big and connected children's books, juvenile books, and adult books.

During the next decade the reading of a few big books (and extracts of these) was gradually supplemented with the reading of several smaller books; to a certain extent, the specialist literature entered the instruction.

In the course of the next decade the teaching of reading was marked by the



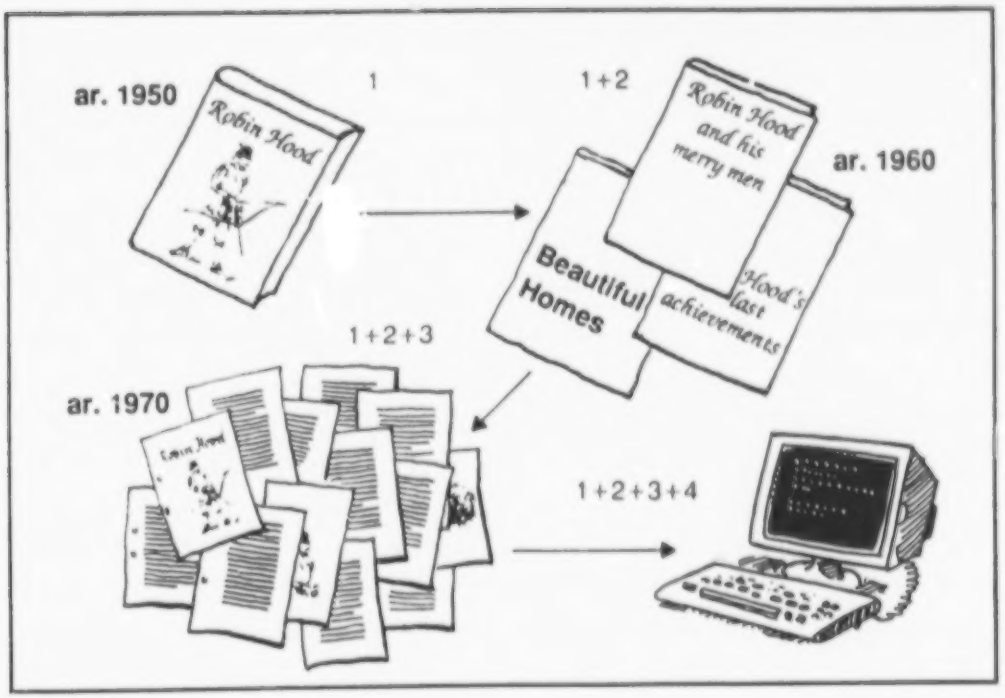




*Figure 14*
During the latest decades, the solid book, the traditional printed medium, has been supplemented with radically different media.

reading of more books (and extracts from them), often smaller books, sometimes also special books, and not seldom books of non-fiction and journals (and extracts from these).

Naturally, such reading matter had been known for a great many years, but now it became part of the everyday life - and gradually also of the reading education. In offices and associations and in public and private institutions the multitude of the photocopies appeared during the following decade - and in the next years they spread to the education.

The reading of such copies was the reading of *extracts* - and it was clearly different from the reading of one complete and connected big book.

Another thing is that these copies were in many cases much poorer to read than the books. Also regarding the contents reading had now changed:

From being reading of a long connected text, reading was now often reading of very short texts without any introductory comments, and more often than not the conclusions were not among the pages of the books that were copied: „Read chapter 3, and pay special attention to the captions" could very well be a piece of homework - chapters 1, 2 and 4-11 simply not being accessible to the pupils!

*At the same time* the children and the young had to be able to read both fiction, faction, and non-fiction - just like during the previous decade; and still the big books of fiction stood on the shelf - and everybody expected them to be read, too. Such expectations still exist:

For reading has not changed *from* the reading of one big book to the reading of several smaller books - and further to the reading of photocopies. At the end of the 1970s reading became the reading of 1 + 2 + 3 + ...?

It is very important not to forget the dots, because during the last years of the 1970s not only the TV transmissions with subtitles appeared, but also the personal computers with their special texts. They entered trade and industry as well as public institutions; they were now on their way into the homes, too - and they were there to stay.

During a period of just under 40 years reading in Denmark had changed dramatically.

What might look like a transition from 1 -> 2 -> 3 -> 4 should in actual fact be put as a sum total: from 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + ...

- and still in most cases perhaps only 1, maybe also 2 are taught?

The development of the reading education and the reading research may focus on processes as well as on the products existing and arising within a framework as e.g. the classroom or the family - educational guides or sets of reading materials for the class.

'An ecological dimension' can be inserted by pointing out the additional importance of relationships between 'systems' which are also essential. Some of these 'systems' are mentioned above, e.g. the family or the classroom; these are 'systems' including the individual child.

'An ecological system' may also include an adjoining or surrounding system

- e.g. the educational guides or the sets of materials used in the class just now. In some cases, such a surrounding system is central, that is to say by determining what may (or may not) occur in the specific situation when the reading of the pupils is considered.

Systems like these may reach far beyond and - apparently - altogether away from the reading of the child; this is true of e.g. the education and the occupation of the parents, the possibilities provided by such background factors, and the demands made by them.

The relations between society and school, between family and institutional structures, between TV and other media, etc. also play an important part. Even if such systems may be far from what is understood by 'reading', their influence is not discontinued; it may become more diffuse. Perhaps in some cases this influence is effective in an opaque manner through other systems, but it may very well still be there - and even be strong.

The aim of the article has been to place *reading* in something that - perhaps as a piece of disingenuousness as far as the term is concerned - is called *an ecological connection*.

The purpose has been to illustrate the relations between some of the many factors influencing the reading matter, the reading education, the reading research - reading - in connection with different societies, primarily in order to describe reading as *the* dynamic factor within the social development that *reading* also constitutes.

It is not only a question of new reading possibilities arising in the society - they also influence the society in which they arise and develop.

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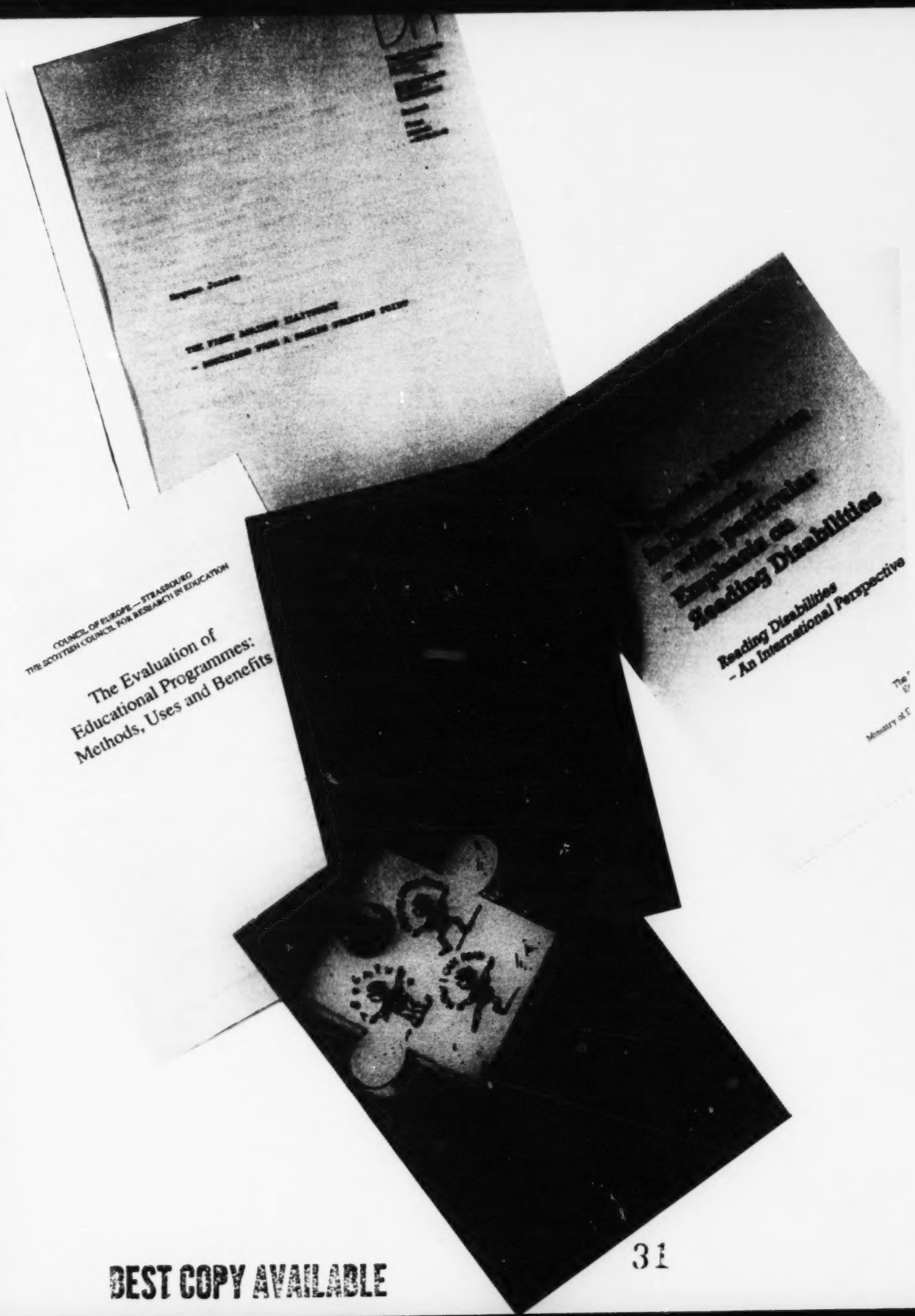


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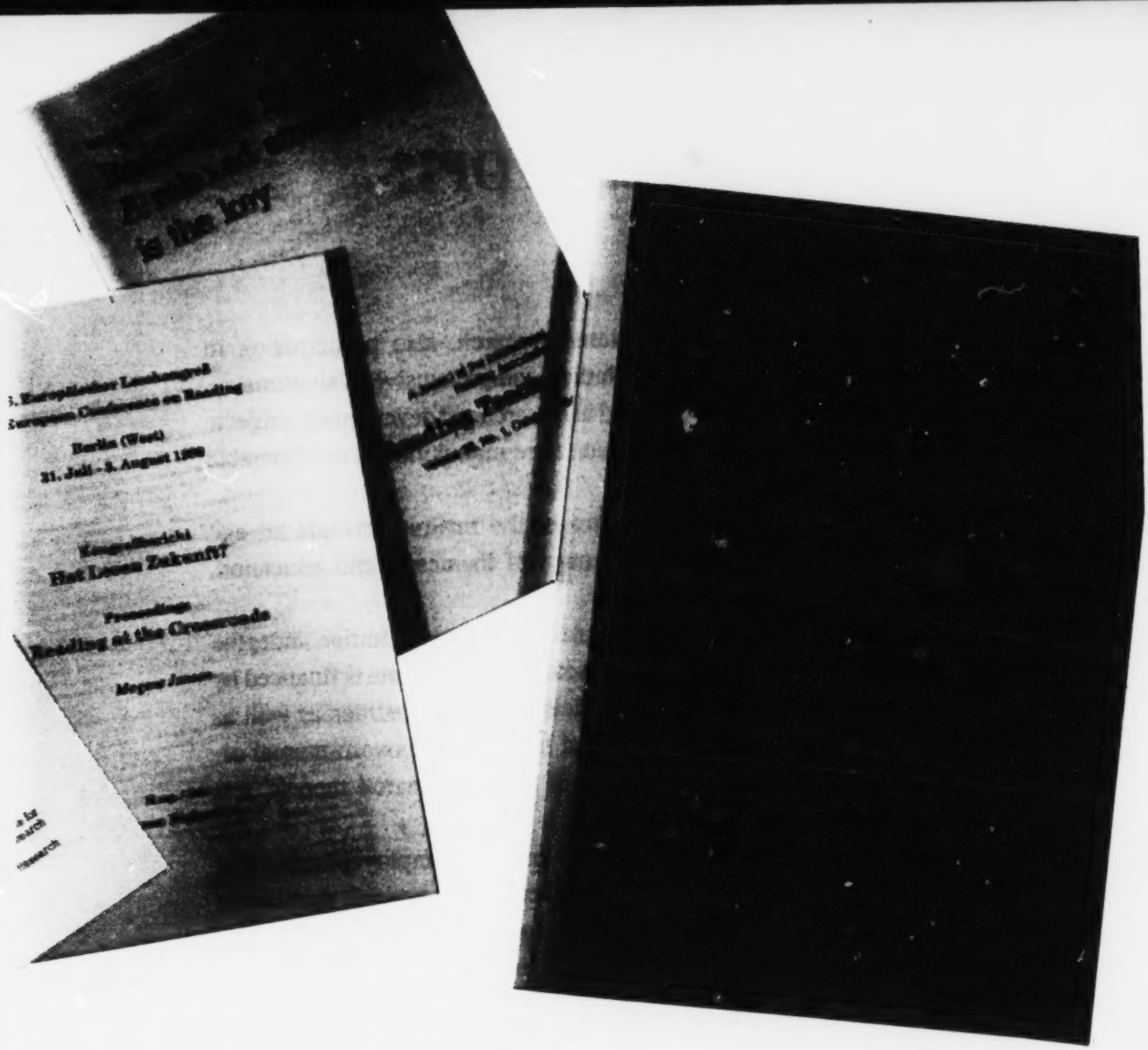

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